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2008

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



## BELARUS

Belarus has a highly authoritarian government, with almost all political power concentrated in the hands of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and his small circle of advisors. The Lukashenko regime has engaged in numerous serious human rights abuses, including involvement in the “disappearances” of several key opposition figures, the imprisonment of political opponents and journalists, and strict controls on the media. Human rights conditions deteriorated further after the March 2006 presidential elections, which observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other organizations deemed fraudulent. The government of Belarus also continues to commit serious violations of the right of its citizens to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. Religious freedom conditions, which had already declined as a result of the strict law on religion passed in October 2002, deteriorated further in

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2007. The Commission continues to place Belarus on its Watch List, and will maintain scrutiny throughout the year to determine whether the government’s record has deteriorated to a level warranting designation as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC.

According to the U.S. Department of State’s 2007 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the human rights record of the Belarus government “remained very poor and worsened in some areas, as the government continued to commit frequent serious abuses.” The State De-

partment reports that the Belarus government continued to engage in arbitrary arrests, detentions, and imprisonment of citizens for political reasons, such as for criticizing officials or participating in demonstrations. Court trials, whose outcomes were usually predetermined, were often conducted behind closed doors without an independent judiciary or independent observers.

The State Department also reported that respect for religious freedom worsened in the past year, citing, among other factors, that authorities continued to harass and fine members of certain religious groups, especially those whom officials regard as linked to foreign cultures or having political agendas. Government structures to control and restrict religious groups are extensive and intrusive, leading some human rights groups to compare the situation for religious freedom in Belarus to that under the former Soviet regime. For example, Belarus has maintained its Soviet-era religious affairs bureaucracy, which includes a Plenipotentiary for Religious and Nationality Affairs, which was known until July 2006 as the State Committee for Religious and Nationality Affairs. The Plenipotentiary maintains a staff in Minsk as well as several officials in each of the country’s six regions. According to the Forum 18 News Service, the six regions have 20 districts, with each district having a Department for Relations with Religious and Social Organizations as well as a Commission for Monitoring Compliance with Legislation on Religion.

The country’s religion law, passed in October 2002, led to greater restrictions on religious freedom in Belarus. The law codified the activities of the official Committee of Religious and Nationality Affairs (since renamed) of the Council of Ministers (CRNA) and set up severe regulatory obstacles and major bureaucratic and legal restrictions on the activities of many religious communities. Essentially, the 2002 religion law prohibits: all religious activity by unregistered groups; any activity of religious communities except in areas in which they are registered; foreign citizens from leading religious activities; and unapproved religious activity in private homes, with the exception of small, occasional prayer meetings. The law set up a three-tiered system of registration, and particularly restricts the activities of groups on the lowest tier. The law also mandated that all existing religious communities in Belarus re-register with the CRNA by November 2004. Most previously registered groups were re-registered, but the law was viewed as a strengthening of the government’s opportunities to deny registration to disfavored groups.





Monuments in the Brest fortress in Belarus, depicting the courage of the soldiers that defended it. The fortress took the first blow during the Nazi invasion in 1941. (OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev)

In the past year, thousands of individuals from various Christian and other religious communities signed a petition to the Belarusian government to protest the country's repressive 2002 religion law and other restrictions on religious freedom. In July 2007, Belarusian police in Minsk and at a Catholic pilgrimage site in Budslav detained 19 persons who were collecting signatures on a petition to reform the 2002 law. Arrestees included the secretary of the Belarusian Christian Democracy movement. Police confiscated literature, including 7,000 newsletters and several hundred copies of a booklet, "Monitoring Violations of the Rights of Christians in Belarus in 2006." Fourteen were detained for three hours without charge by district police in Budslav. A protocol was drawn up against the petition organizer, claiming he had distributed literature without publication details; he was warned to expect prosecution in Minsk, although as of this writing, he has not been contacted. (In Belarus, a person may legally distribute up to 300 copies of a piece of literature without publication details.) According to the news agency Forum 18, Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandr Kosinets, speaking at an unprecedented roundtable of religious leaders in Minsk in September

2007, rejected the possibility that legal amendments to the law would be accepted. Kosinets also reportedly rejected Protestant leaders' suggestion to introduce a category of "religious group" that would not need state registration. In March 2008, the petition gained the necessary 50,000 signatures and was submitted to the Constitutional Court, Parliament, and Presidential Administration; the Court replied that appeals should be submitted via President Lukashenko, parliament, or other authorized state bodies. However, Forum 18 reported that later that month, government agencies rejected the mass petition, claiming that reports of religious freedom violations "do not correspond with reality."

Since coming to power in 1994, President Lukashenko has openly favored the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), an Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate Russian Orthodox Church, resulting in a privileged position for the BOC. This relationship was codified in June 2003, when the Belarus government and the BOC signed a concordat setting out the Church's influence in public life, which has contributed to the difficulties for many religious minorities (see below). In March 2004, the Belarusian government granted the BOC the exclusive right to use the word

“Orthodox” in its title. Several “independent” Orthodox churches that do not accept the authority of the Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow have been denied registration, including the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BAOC) and the True Orthodox Church, a branch of the Orthodox Church that rejected the compromise with the Soviet government made by the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1920s. Authorities have warned a priest from the unregistered Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) that he could be jailed and fined for conducting “illegal religious activities,” including small gatherings in private homes. In November 2005, authorities denied registration to a ROCA parish in Ruzhany; a religious affairs official in Brest reportedly told ROCA members to worship at the BOC. In recent years, ROCA members have been fined four times, for a total of over \$2,000, for worshipping in private homes. The community has more than once applied for registration, but in October 2006, there were reports that BOC officials were pressuring parishioners to withdraw their signatures from registration applications. Even the BOC is sometimes subject to government harassment. Forum 18 reported that in March 2007, the Committee for State Security (KGB) raided a prayer meeting of the BOC Transfiguration Fellowship in the city of Gomel, in the first known instance since the Soviet period of BOC adherents being targeted in Belarus for their religious activity.

Some religious groups have been consistently denied registration, particularly Protestant groups. Forum 18 reported in January 2008 that a secret ruling by the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs allegedly denied state registration to 12 “destructive sects”; included in that group were not only Aum Shinrikyo and Satanists, but also Ahmadiya Muslims.

One frequent basis for registration or re-registration denials has been the failure to provide a valid legal address, although, in some cases, registration is required before such an address can be obtained. Another basis is the alleged failure to limit activities to a specified location. In many cases, officials do not provide any reason for the denial of re-registration requests. In 2006, the Belarus government rejected the UN Human Rights Committee’s decision that it had violated religious freedom by refusing to register a nationwide Hare Krishna association. The authorities maintained that their refusal was “justified” because it was in accordance with Belarusian law, but they failed to address the UN Committee’s finding that a requirement for state-approved physical premises to gain

legal registration is “a disproportionate limitation of the Krishna devotees’ right to manifest their religion” under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In June 2006, a Minsk court deregistered the Christ’s Covenant Reformed Baptist Church for lack of legal addresses.

Without state registration, religious communities can be liable for fines levied under a Soviet-era provision of the Administrative Violations Code. Evidence indicates that since 2004, the Belarus authorities have increased the amount of the fines as well as expanded the range of religious groups that are subject to them. Until two years ago, such fines were usually approximately \$15, and most often imposed on Council of Churches Baptist congregations, which refuse on theological grounds to register with any state authorities. Since 2006, fines have increased, in some cases dramatically. Forum 18 reported that in January 2008, the Baranovichi Emergencies Department fined the pastor and administrator of the New Life Pentecostal Church a total of \$228 for fire safety violations, which is the equivalent of almost three weeks’ average wages. Pastor Kabushko suggested that the fire safety demands were an indirect way of putting pressure on his church. The Baranovichi congregation was first fined for fire safety violations a year ago and a major outlay of funds have been spent to meet the state authorities’ requirements. The previous year, the same church was fined a total of \$5,455 for “unsanctioned” religious activity. A court also ordered fines totaling \$386 for three Baptist Council of Churches members in the same town in December 2007. Also in December 2007, members of a church in Grodno complained of an “illegally imposed fine” of \$64 handed down to their pastor by a Grodno Court for holding an unregistered Harvest Festival service.

In addition to fines, the Belarusian authorities appear to be adopting tougher sanctions, such as short-term detentions and imprisonment, against church leaders and parishioners who take part in unregistered religious activity. In March 2006, the pastor of the Minsk-based Christ’s Covenant Reformed Baptist Church received a 10-day prison term for conducting religious worship in his home. It was the first time in 20 years that a religious leader had been sentenced to imprisonment in Belarus. The church’s re-registration request had previously been denied. Pentecostal Bishop Sergey Tsvor faced similar charges, but they were dropped because of technical errors made by the police. Also in March 2006, authorities sentenced human rights lawyer Sergey Shavtsov to 10 days in detention

for conducting an unsanctioned interdenominational seminar in a private cafe. In June 2007, one week after being fined for leading Sunday worship in John the Baptist Pentecostal Church in Minsk, Pastor Antoni Bokun was given a three-day prison term for leading a service; making him the third known person to be given short-term detention in post-Soviet Belarus for religious activity.

While re-registered religious organizations, including Muslims, Lutherans, and Baha'is, have held worship services at residential addresses without prosecution, the Administrative Violations Code (Article 167) and the 2002 religion law forbid most religious activity outside designated houses of worship without advance approval from state authorities. A first offense is punishable by a warning, a fine of between 20 and 150 times the minimum monthly wage, or three to 15 days' imprisonment. A second violation within one year is punishable by a fine of between 150 and 300 times the minimum monthly wage or 10 to 15 days' imprisonment. While the law permits persons to gather in private homes to pray, it requires that individuals obtain permission from local authorities to hold rituals, rites, or ceremonies in homes. In addition, the 1998 Civil Code and the 1999 Housing Code do not allow a religious organization to be located at a residential address unless it has been re-designated as non-residential. Although the 2002 religion law allows a religious organization to meet at free-standing residential premises if local authorities approve, in practice, this process is largely left to individual officials who usually prevent religious communities from meeting for worship in residential buildings. Strict interpretation of the law may result in fines for worshippers. For four years, Protestant leaders have been trying to have this situation addressed, and in spring 2007, Adventist, Baptist, and Pentecostal leaders appealed to President Lukashenko. The Presidential Administration's Department for Communication with Citizens confirmed that religious organizations may legally meet in private homes if local state authorities agree. Yet, police continued to interfere with religious meetings in residences several times in 2007, sometimes fining participants. In particular, Baptists, Pentecostals, and other Protestants were warned or fined for illegally conducting and hosting religious services.

In addition to problems for home worship, the government continued to limit the ability of a number of groups to own or use property for religious purposes. The

government permits the use of residential property for religious services only after it has been formally converted from residential use. This interpretation of the law effectively requires all religious organizations to re-register their properties as religious properties. However, authorities continued to reject requests for property registration from many Protestant churches, as well as from other religious groups new to Belarus. The State Department reports that in 2006 and 2007, the Living Word Church in the city of Grodno tried and failed at least seven times to rent meeting space from state proprietors. Minsk authorities informed the unregistered John the Baptist Church that it could not rent space at the state Trade Unions House in June 2007, allegedly due to "scheduling conflicts." Moreover, Protestants in particular have expressed concern that securing permission to build new churches is almost im-

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possible. In Minsk, city planners reportedly will not grant any such permits until 2030. Protestant churches also report being viewed as commercial organizations with regard to the Minsk Development Fund; those seeking property permits must pay a sum set by Minsk authorities that may be as high as hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In addition, Forum 18 reports that some of the smaller religious communities continued to face great difficulties in rebuilding premises for worship in the past year. For example, the Grodno region Baptist congregation has been denied permission to rebuild its wooden 1920s church building. A related problem is the extreme difficulty in gaining official, legal re-designation of property for worship purposes, a situation affecting mainly Protestant communities, as unlike the Orthodox and Catholics,

they are much less likely to own worship buildings. In February 2008, in response to the indefinite adjournment of a court case on the fate of their church building, the New Life Church in Minsk opted for civil disobedience, refusing to allow state inspectors who can impose fines onto church property; its pastor is currently threatened with a fine. The impasse appeared linked to uncertainty regarding which state body should resolve the issue. In late 2006, Grodno authorities granted permission to the Roman Catholic Blessed Virgin Mary Mother congregation to build a church for its 8,000 members; the parish had been worshipping in a wooden house that could hold only 300. Twelve members of the church had launched a hunger strike in early December 2006 until authorities acceded to their eight year long request.

Various other laws, regulations, and directives also restrict the activities of registered religious communities. For example, groups are not allowed to function outside their geographic area of registration. If a registered religious community does not qualify as a “central association”—meaning it has not been legally recognized for over 20 years or it does not have enough members—it cannot own media outlets or invite people from outside Belarus to work with the community, as in the case of the Greek Catholic Church. The Society for Krishna Consciousness also does not qualify as a central association and therefore cannot rent a hall or produce a publication with a print run of over 300.

All religious literature is subject to compulsory government censorship. Religious publishing is restricted to religious groups that have 10 registered communities, including at least one that was in existence in 1982. This requirement is onerous, since the cut-off date of 1982 goes back to the Soviet period of religious repression when few religious groups could operate. Some members of religious communities are harassed, fined, and detained for “illegally” distributing religious literature. For example, the government continued to harass and fine Hare Krishnas for distributing religious literature. According to the State Department, in January 2007, authorities confiscated 14 books from a Hare Krishna who was fined \$15 (32,000 rubles) for illegally distributing religious material.

Although religious groups considered “new” to Belarus face many of the most serious problems, religious groups, such as Catholics and Jews, which are viewed by the government as more “traditional,” were also not ex-



“Island of tears,” Minsk.

empt from offensive remarks by government officials or state media. For example, President Lukashenko himself is reported to have made public anti-Semitic comments. In October 2007, he referred to the Belarusian town of Babruysk as a “pigsty,” and “mainly a Jewish town—and you know how Jews treat the place where they are living.” His comments were broadcast live on national radio. President Lukashenko has also made anti-Semitic statements in the past, such as comparing dishonest oligarchs with Jews and likening his critics to people with “hooked noses.” In June 2007, the state newspaper *Respublika* published an article that compared contemporary Catholic missionary activities to the Crusades and branded the involvement of Pope John Paul II in the fall of communism as a “devilish enterprise,” alleging his collaboration with the CIA. The Polish community in Belarus called for criminal charges against the article’s author as well as the newspaper’s editor, and the paper later issued an apology.

Despite an order by the Prosecutor General and the Ministry of Information to remove from circulation the anti-Semitic and xenophobic newspaper *Russki Vestnik*,



distribution of the newspaper resumed through the state-distribution agency. As in previous years, anti-Semitic literature continued to be sold at the National Academy of Sciences, and anti-Semitic literature is openly sold at several Belarusian Orthodox book fairs. The Roman Catholic Church reported that anti-Catholic literature is also sold at places linked to the Orthodox Church. Anti-Semitic and Russian ultra-nationalist newspapers and books are still sold at Pravoslavnaya Kniga (Orthodox Bookstore), a store that sells Orthodox literature and religious paraphernalia. The official Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) prayer calendar, printed in Minsk, continued to mark May 20 as the anniversary of the 1690 death of a young child who was alleged to have been murdered by Jews. The May 20 prayer refers to Jews as “real beasts” who allegedly kidnapped and murdered the child for religious purposes; a link on the BOC Web site listed the child as one of the Church’s saints and martyrs.

The Belarus government continued to demonstrate a lax attitude towards the problem of societal anti-Semitism and has not responded adequately to find and hold accountable those responsible for vandalism against Jewish memorials, cemeteries, or other property. According to the State Department, acts of anti-Semitic vandalism increased in 2007. In February 2007, neo-Nazi activists attacked Larissa Shukailo, who is the Jewish director of the Mogilyov branch of the Belarusian Association for Victims of Political Repression. Shukailo filed an official complaint, but no suspects had been identified several months later. In March, independent media reported two acts of vandalism of sites commemorating the killing of Minsk ghetto Bremen Jews; also in that month, vandals damaged the Star of David on a memorial in Kurapaty honoring Jewish victims of Stalinism. In May 2007 in the city of Borisov, police opened a criminal case in connection with the vandalism of the local Jewish cemetery, but several months later no suspects had been identified. In June, local Jewish leaders reported that a Jewish cemetery had been vandalized in Mogilyov; relatives appealed to the police, one of whom claimed that the tombstones may have been knocked down by a wind storm. As of mid-2007, there were three acts of vandalism against the monument to the victims of the Brest Jewish ghetto; police opened a criminal case but did not identify any suspects. The State Department reported that Jewish leaders petitioned the

government in 2007 to investigate neo-Nazi activities, citing continued vandalism, anti-Semitic graffiti, and threats to civil society and religious congregations. Authorities responded with sympathetic letters but did not open any criminal cases in connection with these complaints.

The Belarusian authorities also continued in 2007 to use textbooks that promoted intolerance, particularly towards “non-traditional” religions. Leaders of Protestant groups criticized the chapter entitled “Beware of Sects,” which includes a paragraph on Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Ministry of Education continued to use another textbook which labels Protestants and Hare Krishnas as “sects,” although according to the State Department, the authorities promised to change the language in the books’ next edition. State-controlled print and broadcast media has also promoted intolerant views of “new” religious groups. In May 2007, the pastor of God’s Grace Head Church received a letter from the state-controlled Lad television channel denying any wrongdoing after a broadcast that referred to the community as a “totalitarian and destructive sect.” In June 2007, state television channel ONT ran a news review item on “neo-Pentecostal sects.” A summary of that program claimed that Jehovah’s Witnesses and neo-Pentecostals, “with the aid of psychotechnology...drive people out of their minds”...and that they were the ones behind the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

Because the 2002 religion law states that religious organizations do not have priority in reclaiming property confiscated in Soviet times if a former worship building is now used for culture or sports activities, only nine of 92 historic synagogues in Belarus have been returned to the Jewish community since the country’s independence in 1991. In another property dispute, the St. Joseph Catholic community in Minsk continued its campaign for the government to return a former Bernardine church and its monastery buildings, currently housing the state archives and slated to be converted into a hotel and entertainment center. In March 2007, the government made public new development plans; in response, the community launched a petition drive, which by March 2008 had reportedly garnered as many as 50,000 signatures.

In January 2008, Belarus issued a decree that further tightened strict government regulations on foreign religious workers. The Plenipotentiary for Religious and Na-

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tionality Affairs is now given sole discretion to rule on the necessity of religious work by foreign citizens. Moreover, the Plenipotentiary is not required to give reasons for refusing a foreign religious worker's visit, and he may shorten a visit "if the period of time required for realization of the aims for which the foreign citizen is invited does not correspond to that requested." Under the religion law, foreign religious workers must be invited by registered religious associations. In addition, the application procedure for foreign religious worker invitations is now much more detailed and must include relevant work experience, the timetable and syllabus of the relevant religious educational institution, and proof of knowledge of Belarusian and Russian. Approval for visits by foreign religious workers often involves a lengthy bureaucratic process, as the law requires one-year, multiple-entry "spiritual activities" visas for foreign missionaries and clergy. An organization inviting foreign clergy must make a written request to the Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs (OPRRNA) including the proposed dates and reason for the requested visit. Even if the visit is for charitable activities, representatives must obtain a visa and permission from OPRRNA, which then has 20 days to respond; there is no appeal provision.

After its post-1991 revival, the Roman Catholic Church has experienced a shortage of qualified native clergy. Seven Polish Catholic priests and five nuns were expelled in late 2006; among other reasons, a reported factor was their "youth" and the fact that their alcohol rehabilitation meetings were open to everyone. A reported 12,000 people protested their expulsion, including several Catholic bishops. The Belarusian Consulate in Warsaw has warned priests on short visits not to engage in any religious activity. In late 2007, 700 Catholics protested the government's order that the Polish priest of the Gomel

region's Holy Trinity Church leave Belarus by March 2008; the denial of the priest's annual visa may have been linked to his negative comments about Belarus in a 2007 interview in a Polish newspaper.

According to the State Department's religious freedom report, legislation prohibits "subversive activities" by foreign organizations and the setting up of offices by foreign organizations that incite "national, religious, and racial enmity" or "have negative effects on people's physical and mental health." In May 2007, a Polish citizen, an unofficial pastor of the John the Baptist Church, was fined \$15 for holding unauthorized religious services at a fellow pastor's home. He was ordered to leave the country by June 7 for "repeated violations of the regime governing the presence of foreigners" and barred from reentry for five years; authorities also canceled his residency permit due to his alleged involvement in "activities aimed at causing damage to the national security." Moreover, if foreign citizens have not explicitly stated that they plan to participate in religious activities in Belarus, they can be reprimanded or expelled. In February 2007, the Belarus government deported seven U.S. citizens and banned them from the country for two years for "illegal teaching and illegal religious activities," charging the group with administrative violations and fining them because they had not obtained permission from the Education Ministry before teaching English at a house of worship in Mogilyov. In June 2007, however, a court reversed the order. In another case involving an American citizen, in March 2007 the residence permit of a U.S. Protestant humanitarian aid worker in Minsk was cancelled and he was deported. Belarusian officials claimed he was involved in activities "aimed at causing damage to national security" but did not define the alleged threat. Members of the Hare Krishna community continued to report that existing legislation prevents



them from inviting foreign clergy to participate in religious activities.

In contrast to the harsh measures described above, Lukashenko signed a law in late 2005 that exempted from tax the land and property of many religious organizations. The list of eligible religious organizations includes those denied re-registration but not yet liquidated by court order, such as the Minsk-based New Life Church and the Minsk Society for Krishna Consciousness. However, the recently liquidated Minsk-based Belarusian Evangelical Church and Belarusian Evangelical Reformed Union reportedly are not included.

The Commission traveled to Belarus in 2003 and met with officials of the State Committee on Religious and Nationalities Affairs as well as with representatives of various religious and human rights groups. The Commission released a report on Belarus in May 2003 with recommendations for U.S. policy, reflecting the findings from its visit to that country. The Commission welcomed passage of the 2004 Belarus Democracy Act as well as President Bush's reauthorization of that Act in January 2007. This legislation reflected certain Commission recommendations regarding freedom of religion in Belarus.

Throughout the past year, Commission staff has met with independent human rights activists from Belarus, including the author of the "White Book," an extensive report on religious persecution in that country. In the past year, the Commission continued to take part in meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presenting information on freedom of religion in Belarus and meeting with Belarusian officials. In January 2008, Commission staff spoke in Brussels about U.S. policy promoting freedom of religion or belief at events sponsored by the non-governmental organization European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination.



## COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

213

Regarding multilateral approaches and international organizations, the Commission recommends that the U.S. government should:

- use every measure of public and private diplomacy to advance the protection of human rights, including religious freedom, in Belarus, including enhanced monitoring and public reporting by the U.S. Department of State and the appropriate international organizations;
- coordinate with the European Union on the application of financial sanctions and visa bans on high-ranking Belarusian officials, particularly those who are directly responsible for or who have carried out the government's abuses of religious freedom;
- undertake efforts to prevent Belarus from gaining membership in the new UN Human Rights Council; and
- urge the Belarus government to issue invitations to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus; the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Expression; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders; the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, as well as the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances.

Regarding its bilateral relations with Belarus, the U.S. government should:

- urge the Belarus government to take immediate steps to end repression, including:
  - repealing the highly repressive religion law;
  - ending the practice of denying registration to religious groups and then erecting obstacles to religious practice because of that unregistered status;

- providing the right to conduct religious education and distribute religious material;
  - halting government attacks on the persons and property of minority religious groups;
  - ensuring a greater effort on the part of government officials to find and hold to account perpetrators of attacks on the persons and property of members of religious minorities; and
  - providing free access by domestic and international human rights groups and others to sites of religious violence or the destruction of places of worship;
  - urge the Belarus government to ensure that no religious community is given a status that may result in or be used to justify impairment of the rights of members of other religious groups;
  - urge the Belarus government to publicly condemn, investigate, and prosecute criminal acts targeting Jews and the Jewish community, as well as members of other ethnic and religious communities;
  - continue to support, publicly and privately, persons and groups engaged in the struggle against repression in Belarus, including the group of religious and opposition activists who make up the Freedom of Religion Initiative that published the “White Book”; and
  - organize roundtables inside Belarus between members of registered and unregistered religious communities and international experts on freedom of religion.
- Regarding U.S. programs and policies, the U.S. government should:
- institute fully the measures set forth in the 2007 Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act, which expresses the sense of Congress that sanctions be applied against the government of Belarus until the U.S. president “determines and certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that the government of Belarus has made significant progress” in meeting human rights conditions designated in the bill, including: the release of individuals who have been jailed on account of their political beliefs; the withdrawal of politically motivated charges against opposition figures; a full accounting of the “disappearances” of noted opposition leaders and journalists; and the cessation of all forms of harassment of independent media, non-governmental organizations, opposition groups, and religious organizations; specific sanctions would include: the denial of entry into the United States to high-ranking Belarusian officials, and the prohibition of strategic exports and U.S. government financing to the Belarusian government, except for humanitarian goods and agricultural or medical products;
  - ensure that the activities to promote democracy authorized by the Belarus Democracy Act include the right to freedom of religion or belief and the promotion of religious tolerance;
  - urge Congress and the State Department to ensure that U.S. government-funded radio broadcasts to Belarus, including those of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, continue at least at their present levels and that efforts are made to secure sufficient transmission capacity to ensure reliable reception throughout that country; and
  - provide increased international travel opportunities, particularly to attend international conferences, for Belarusian civil society leaders, including representatives of human rights groups and religious leaders, and others who defend freedom of religion in that country.

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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